

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1838

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 4070

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, RP

SUBJECT: POLITICAL PRISONERS

REF: (A) STATE 063737 (B) MANILA 14831 (12/18/74)

(C) MANILA A-323 (9/25/74)

BEGIN SUMMARY: EMBASSY DOES NOT KNOW HOW MANY POLITICAL PRISONERS REMAIN IN GOVERNMENT CUSTODY AND WHILE WE CAN CONSTRUCT FIGURE, BELIEVE THIS WOULD BE MISLEADING EXERCISE. WE HAVE NO WAY OF DETERMINING HOW MANY OF 2,267 DETAINEES GOVERNMENT CLAIMS TO HAVE RELEASED SINCE 12/11/74 FALL UNDER POLITICAL PRISONER RUBRIC. EMBASSY REITERATES CAVEAT MADE IN PREVIOUS REPORTING (AND REFLECTED PARA 2 REFTEL A) ABOVE INVOLVING OURSELVES IN POLITICAL PRISONERS NUMBERS GAME. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY SHARES FULLY DEPARTMENT'S CONFUSION (REFTEL A) ON NUMBER OF POLITICAL PRISONERS. THIS HARDLY SURPRISING SINCE GOP SPARES NO EFFORT PROMOTE CONFUSION THROUGH MISINFORMATION POLICY ON DETAINEE RELEASES AND BY CONSISTENT FAILURE STATE WHY PRISONERS BEING RELEASED WERE ORIGINALLY APPREHENDED.

2. SINCE DEC. 11, 1974, PRESIDENT MARCOS CLAIMS HE HAS RELEASED 2,267 DETAINEES (A-81 OF MARCH 11, 1975. PRESI-
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DENT RELEASED ADDITIONAL 101 FOR EASTER). IT IS NOT

RPT NOT POSSIBLE TO STATE WITH ACCURACY HOW MANY OF THESE ARE POLITICAL DETAINEES. GOVERNMENT ASSIDUOUSLY ATTEMPTS TO FOSTER IMPRESSION MANY OF THEM WERE, THEREBY PROVING FOREIGN CRITICISM OF REPRESSIVE ASPECTS OF MARCOS' REGIME IS -- TO USE ONE OF MARCOS' FAVORATE TERMS OF OPPORBRIUM -- "MISCHIEVOUS".

3. AS DEPARTMENT AWARE, WE HAVE BEEN USING BALLPARK ESTIMATE OF 500 FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS, I.E. CIVILIAN POLITICAL OPPONENTS OF MARCOS' MARTIAL LAW REGIME (REF C.). THIS FIGURE WAS BASED ON TAKING 10 PERCENT OF GROUP ONE PRISONERS UNDER COMMAND FOR ADMINISTRATION OF DETAINEES (CAD). GROUP ONE CONSITIUTES THOSE CONSIDERED THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY. IF GOVERNMENT CLAIMS THAT 2,267 DETAINEES RELEASED SINCE 12/74 IS ACCURATE AND THERE HAS BEEN NO NEW WAVE OF ARRESTS SINCE (WHICH SEEMS THE CASE), TOTAL CAD DETAINEE FIGURE WOULD PROBABLY DECLINE TO ABOUT 4,500 WITH MIX OF ABOUT 3,000 GROUP ONE AND 1,500 GROUP TWO (THOSE WHO HAVE COMMITTED CRIMINAL ACTS UNRELATED TO NATIONAL SECURITY). WHILE WE COULD CONSTRUCT NEW POLITICAL PRISONER QUESTIMATE OUT OF CAD GROUP ONE FIGURE BY APPLYING MULTIPLIER OF 10 PERCENT, WE WOULD HAVE CONSIDERABLY LESS CONFIDENCE IN RESULTANT PRODUCT THAN OUR PREVIOUS HYPOTHETICAL EFFORT. POINT IS THAT MORE WE EXAMINE PROBLEM AND MORE GOVERNMENT REACTS TO SCRUTINY, THE GREATER ARE THE UNKNOWNNS. WE, THEREFORE, WOULD SUGGEST WE AGREE THAT FIGURE HAS DECLINED BELOW 500 LEVEL WITHOUT ATTEMPTING TO PUT TOO FINE A POINT ON IT.

4. SEN. AQUINO, EUGENIO LOPEZ, JR., AND SERGIO OSMENA III ARE NOW PRE-EMINENT POLITICAL DETAINEES (ALTHOUGH ALL THREE MAY ALSO BE GUILTY OF CRIMINAL ACTS.). EMBASSY HEARS EXTREMELY LITTLE ABOUT OTHER POLITICAL DETAINEES. THIS DOES NOT SUGGEST THEY DO NOT EXIST, BUT RATHER THAT THEY ARE SMALL-FRY AND HAVE NO ONE OF PROMINENCE INTERESTED IN CHAMPIONING THEIR CAUSE. FOR EXAMPLE, BORADSIDES OF ASSOCIATION OF MAJOR RELIGIOUS SUPERIOUS HAVE LITTLE OR NOTHING TO SAY ABOUT POLITICAL DETAINEES EXCEPT FOR BIG THREE CITED ABOVE AND CERTAIN CLERICS SUCH AS DE LA TORRE, LAHOZ, JALANDONI, ETC.
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5. COMMENT: PRESIDENT MARCOS RECENTLY CLAIMED (3/1/75) IN PRESS CONFERENCE THAT THERE ARE NO RPT NO POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE PHILIPPINES. THIS IS CULMINATIN OF GOVERNMENT'S EFFORT TO "DEFINE AWAY" TERM POLITICAL PRISONERS. IN POINT OF FACT, THERE ARE POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE PHILIPPINES. IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, HOWEVER, EVEN FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO DETERMINE

THEIR EXACT NUMBER, HOW THEY ARE DEFINED, WHY THEY HAVE
BEEN DETAINED, HOW LONG THEY HAVE BEEN DETAINED, ETC.
WE TRUST THE FOREGOING IS OF SOME USE TO THE DEPARTMENT.
WE STRONGLY REITERATE THE POINT THAT WE HAVE TRIED TO MAKE
IN ALL OF OUR PREVIOUS REPORTING ON THE POLITICAL PRISONERS
ISSUE, I.E. IT IS FRUITLESS TO ENGAGE IN POLITICAL PRISONERS'
NUMBERS GAME AND WE SHOULD AVOID SPECULATION ON NUMBER
OF POLITICAL PRISONERS HERE.
SULLIVAN

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